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SUBJECT: Report on Northern Region Politics

Vice Consul Robert W. ROSS made a 2,115-mile trip by automobile around the Northern Region of Nigeria between January 4 and 16, 1952 in the company of the Resident Representative of General Motors Corporation. While maximum results were not obtained from the tour because of the fact that the trip had to be made with a private individual in his automobile, the tour clearly demonstrated the necessity of such travel in Nigeria for reporting officers of the Consulate General. Despite the short notice we were able to give the Nigerian Government, excellent cooperation and assistance were offered by officers of the Government during the tour.

The itinerary of the trip was as follows: First day--to Ilorin via Abeokuta, Ibadan and Oyo; second day--to Bida via Jebba and Mokwa; third day--to Kano via Zungeru, Funtua and Malumfashi; fourth and fifth days--in Kano; sixth day--to Zaria via Paki; seventh day--to Jos; eighth, ninth and tenth days in Jos; eleventh day--to Bida via Bukuru, Jemma and Abuja; twelfth day--Bida to Ibadan via Mokwa, Ilorin and Oyo; thirteenth day in Ibadan, leaving for Lagos via Abeokuta on the evening of that day. Through the courtesy of the Lagos Manager of the United Africa Company's Motor Department, the reporting officer stayed in UAC Rest Houses at Ilorin, Bida, Kano, Zaria and Ibadan.

Only casual observations were possible en route to Kano, as the stops were only overnight with early morning departures. No opportunity was given for conversations with officials prior to arrival in Kano. As was the case in Jos and Ibadan, it was found that two or three additional days in the Kano area would have been most useful in seeing a greater number of government officials and local political leaders.

Several points were brought out by the tour. They are fully discussed below, but may be briefly stated as follows:

1. The political

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1. The political scene in the Northern Region is relatively quiet, when compared with the other regions, and there is not the agitation for cessation of British control which prevails in the East and West.

2. The NPC political party is still in firm control of the legislatures of the North and has not been seriously challenged by the southern parties or the North's NEPU.

3. British administrative officials keep their active intervention in Northern politics at a minimum, but the respect in which they are held gives them tremendous influence via suggestion and advice.

4. Northern political leaders are in complete opposition to the anti-Government activities taking place in the south of Nigeria and little progress is being made in achieving real unity between the North and the rest of Nigeria.

The system of government in the Kano Emirate, as in almost all of the Northern Emirates, is based upon preservation of the system found in force by the British authorities when the area was made a protectorate of the British Crown, with one major exception. In an effort to broaden the base of the Northern administrations the British have now put into effect a revision of the omnipotence of the Emirs. No Emir is now allowed to exercise executive power by himself, each one now has a Council of chiefs of various grades whose support for any action he is compelled to seek before moving. The Emir of Kano is a very senior Emir and has, therefor, a council composed of lesser Emirs as well as chiefs with whom he must share executive functions. There are but a handful of British officials acting in the governance of Kano, despite its large size. They act primarily as advisors and are seldom called upon to intercede in government by the Emir in Council, thanks to the long British policy of leaving most of the character of the Kano Emirate unchanged. Probably the most substantial changes have been made in the operation of the courts of the area, where the Moslem law was altered somewhat to, in the words of a British official, "conform with Western ideas of equity." At the time of the reporting officer's visit to a courtroom the Moslem chief judge and one of his legal advisors on the Koran were engaged in a long, serious discussion of the divorce laws of one of Mohammed's disciples which would be applied to the case at hand. It was interesting to note that women are not allowed in the court and the wife gave her testimony through a curtained window from a room beyond the court.

British officials

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British officials do not intervene in the government of the principal Emirates of the North any more than is necessary and are assisted in keeping out of the lime-light by the fact that the leaders of the North, unlike so many in Eastern and Western Nigeria, like and have great confidence in the British officers responsible for governance in the North. However, they do occasionally institute strong reforms. A current example of the type of thing which can be done may be found in the Zaria Emirate. The Emir of Zaria is held to be, by his better-educated subjects, an inept, unprogressive Emir and the British have been asked by members of the community to do something about removing him. This they plan to do and will be able to do with little trouble, due to the lack of public support for the present Emir. The reporting officer asked if it was the intention to establish another Emir and the British officer replied that they would, instead, try a council instead of any single Emir being installed. It was stated that this system would probably be satisfactory to the residents of the Emirate and would give an opportunity to run a sort of "test" of an important Northern government without any Emir at all.

Despite lack of opportunity to visit some of the other principal Northern cities such as Sokoto, Kaduna, Maiduguri and Katsina, it was possible to get a fair idea of the character of politics throughout the North from observation of the situation in Kano--principal city of the Region. The recent actions by the more obstreperous elements in the south have disgusted and annoyed the leaders of Northern Nigeria very much and has done great harm to efforts to secure a real unity of point of view for all of Nigeria. Northerners have gone strongly on record against such ill-considered action as that of the Action Group party in "boycotting" ceremonies and social functions given by the Governor of Nigeria and the NCNC statements to the effect that the present constitution be immediately changed--after but one year being in effect. Typical of the Northern attitude is the statement of one of their Ministers to the Governor that they were tired of "Southern" politics and did not want to hear any more about it. Unfortunately, this attitude indicates two factors--one the political disagreement between Northern and Southern leaders and the other, a somewhat unreal attitude concerning the importance of the South to the North's continued existence as a going concern. The Governor has, incidentally, tried to impress upon the Northern leaders the importance of their continued interest in the politics of the South and of their continued stabilizing participation, but they are rapidly getting "fed-up."

The North-South division in re politics also is found among the British administrative officers, which appears to the

reporting officer

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reporting officer to be an unhealthy thing. Officers who are transferred from posts in the North, to, for example, service in the Secretariat in Lagos dislike the new assignments, almost without exception. Such an attitude would not seem to be conducive to the best cooperation with the very vocal politicos of the Eastern and Western Regions. In the North the British officials, and private individuals as well, look with disdain and dislike upon the Southern politicians and their machinations. In conversations with the reporting officer many of them demonstrated the same desire to ignore developments in the South as have the local leaders--and some of them appear to have pretty well closed their minds to actions south of the Benue and Niger Rivers. This officer received the distinct impression that the attitude of these British officials is transmitted to the Northern leaders in the day- to-day contacts and is a contributory factor in the attitude of independence and separatism held by the Northerners. Northern leaders have often said that if the Eastern and Western Regions go too far and too fast on getting rid of British officials that they (the North) will resume their interrupted conquest of southern Nigeria. This may be somewhat of an exaggeration, but it does truly reflect the North's feeling that they are better and stronger than the southerners and hold the whip hand within what is now Nigeria. If real unity and harmony is to be achieved here it does not appear that the obviously sympathetic attitude of many northern British officials to the North's feeling is going to be any help at all.

The reasons for the British attitude toward the peoples and leaders of the Northern Region are not at all difficult to understand. Living, for foreigners, in the North is much pleasanter and the businesses of government and commerce easier to conduct there. British officials, and residents, are held in high respect by the people of the North and they receive from the locals complete obeisance and the bowing, saluting, etc. which accrues to recognized overlords in such dependent territories. This is pleasant to such officials, as it is to most men. There is also much less dishonesty, corruption and cheating among the peoples of the North--which makes the area a more pleasant place to do business. Encouraging, also, to those who wish to work in the North is the fact of long relative stability in politics, as compared with the East and West. While the southern areas were still being upset by wrangles between chiefs and tribes, as they are even today, the North had been given a relative political quiet by years of rule by Hausa and Habe rulers ruling by the orderly precepts of the Koran. And such Northern leaders as were characterized by dishonesty, corruption or moral degeneracy were removed by the British and replaced by leaders who were both more

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desirable to the people and more amenable to British suggestions. Not to be overlooked in the preference for life in the North is the fact that in relation to the Northern Region, the climate of the south is most unpleasant. The gradual education and political awakening of the East and West has given rise, quite naturally, to noisy nationalism and movement for change which is a great inconvenience to both the local and British administrators, and which most of them would like to see erased. All of these things seem to encourage the feelings of "differentness" encountered in the North.

There is one aspect of the attitude of the Northern leaders which the British officials do not like and about which they would like to do something. This is the bitter opposition by Northerners to the employment in the Region of African civil servants recruited in the south. There are but a very few non-Northerners now employed by the Native Authorities in the Region and the assignment or hiring of additional staff has been stymied. This is becoming a genuine problem as the functions of these local governments are expanded under the terms of the new Nigerian constitution and regional legislation. There is great need for additional civil servants and many could be recruited from among the educated youths of Eastern and Western Nigeria if the idea were acceptable to Northern leaders. The other alternative, of filling the jobs with young men from the North, is not possible because of the relative low number of educated youths in the area and the fact that so many of those who are educated are schooled only in Koranic law, philosophy or other un-utilitarian disciplines. The day is fast approaching when the leaders of the North will either have to accept civil servants from the other Regions or to speed up the training of their young men along more useful, from the government point of view, lines. The latter course will probably be the one followed, as the prejudice against non-Northerners is so strong.

It should be mentioned in passing that the British advisors and administrative officers have a much easier time of their work than do their colleagues in the other two Regions. The leaders in the North have long been willing to accede to the wishes of the British in return for the preservation of most of the governing system found in effect by them when the Protectorate was set up. The situation has changed but little today. There has been some altering of the status quo [illegible] in the fact that now the British are bringing pressure to bear to move the Emirates along more progressive steps that they may catch up with the other two regions whereas it was their desire in the past to leave things pretty much the way they were.

There is still

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There is still no effective challenge to the primacy of the Northern Peoples Congress political party in the Northern Region. The Northern Elements Progressive Union is still trying to win followers but meeting with only a modicum of success. Many of the NPC leaders hope that the NEPU will become slightly more active so that it may absorb all of the so-called "leftist" elements which might otherwise cling to the edges of the NPC, thus depriving it of the complete unity of policy which its leaders wish it to have. It can be safely said that no influential Northerner today belongs to the NEPU, that is no Northerner in a position to challenge the status quo, and that this party is attracting only very small numbers of people who desire radical changes in the government of the North. Southern parties, the NCNC and Action Group, have met with no success in recruiting members in the Northern Region, excepting from amongst the few Easterners and Westerners residing there and who have not yet been fully absorbed into the life of the region.

The plateau political scene is very quiet as compared with the East and West of Nigeria. The same basic system of Native Authorities, District Officers and a Resident prevails as in the rest of the North, excepting the fact that there are no strong Emirs in the province. The Birom people are not at all well-organized and their chief has not been the hereditary authority accruing to an emir. This chief has little executive authority alone, but must make decisions in consultation with various subchiefs from each small location. Government has given the Girom chief a warrant classing him as a Chief Grade III and he must consult with his lower ranking colleagues. A very similar situation prevails among the non-Birom native residents of the plateau. In actual fact, the British administrators take a much more active part in the governance of the plateau than in, for example, Kano Province because of the sparse population, very primitive tribes and lack of firm tribal organization.

There is a certain amount of animosity between the Government, on the one hand, and the foreign miners on the plateau, which more or less forces the Government to proceed cautiously in policies affecting the mines. The main basis for the friction is the government land policies, which are calculated to protect the remaining farm land for the native residents. This, of course, sometimes clashes with the natural desire of the miners to conduct their operations in whatever manner and location they choose. Several of the miners informed the reporting officer that the mines reclamation and land policies of the government cost them

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a considerable amount of money--cutting significantly into the margin of profit on tin exports. However, there is no intent to give the impression that the small amount of friction now existing will create any serious problem in government--private relationships.

Erwin P. Keeler
American Consul General

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